

# MAHASUI PROVERBS: INDIGENOUS APPROACHES TO AN ETHICAL AND SUSTAINABLE CULTURE

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## Abstract

Every language is a storehouse of unique cultural expression and worldview, which gets lost with the language's endangerment and eventual death. Knowledge, practical wisdom, lived experiences, and values conveyed through Indigenous languages and cultures are critical to setting the world on a more sustainable path (UNESCO, 2023). The ethics, morals, and cultural values mould a community towards a sustainable lifestyle. Mahasui, a northwestern Himalayan Indo-Aryan language spoken in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, is marked Definitely Endangered by UNESCO (2010). Himachal Pradesh is an ecologically sensitive region with a biodiverse ecosystem (Environment Master Plan, Himachal Pradesh, 2013), which is heavily affected by climate change. This paper presents Mahasui as an invaluable resource of indigenous knowledge systems essential for a sustainable life. Towards this aim, the paper examines the shared human experiences embedded in the Mahasui language, utilizing proverbs documented and translated in *Himachali Studies* (Hendriksen, 1979) and *Somsi* (Himachal Pradesh Academy of Arts, Culture, and Languages). Mahasui proverbs utilize cultural references to offer insight into the *Pahari* community's ethical, moral, and cultural values. For example, the proverb, /gɔle dʒɔũ gɔŋga, teti 'ubi g'o:r/ (*It is Ganges up to the neck, above that it is darkness*), addresses the issue of boundaries and overconsumption and advises against reaching the end of restraint and endurance, promoting a sustainable lifestyle. The paper discusses Mahasui proverbs advocating for moral values and ethics related to contentment and sustainable living with limited resources. For example, the proverb "*duye re kofte khoblo bɔɾo*" (*In the vessel of another, the ball of wheat is always big*) uses the traditional dish, khoblu, to convey the message that the grass is always greener on the other side. However, one needs to practice contentment and overcome greed to live sustainably. The proverb /jaʈha re lakɾe eki ro bo:j/ (*Sticks for sixty men, for one a load*) highlights the importance of collaboration, cooperation, and societal bonds, which are essential for productivity and problem-solving, signifying the community's collectivistic belief. The Mahasui community's proximity to nature has shaped their lifestyle to be embedded in respect, compassion, responsibility, and local culture and tradition. The paper finds that sustainability is an integral part of the Mahasui community's lived experience, presented as an ethical choice, as documented in the translated proverbs. It signifies indigenous languages and their speakers' diverse experiences are the missing bridge to a sustainable lifestyle in today's multicultural and multilingual world.

**Keywords:** indigenous languages, endangered languages, sustainability, cultural values, lived experiences, ethics, Mahasui, Mahasui proverbs

## 1. Introduction

Excluding major languages, the indigenous, minor, and minoritized languages are losing representation, with the younger generations losing their native languages. It is feared that about 90% of all languages may be replaced by a dominant language by the end of the 21st century, with many languages and thousands of speakers not being acquired by children (UNESCO, 2003). Mahasui (Devy, 2014), too, falls into this category and is currently undergoing a language shift. Mahasui is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Western Himalayan region of India, specifically in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Before the British Raj, Mahasui was the primary language spoken in the Shimla region (earlier known as Mahasu). Today, *The Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* lists Mahasui as Definitely Endangered, with approximately 496,024 speakers, according to data from 1992 (Moseley, 2010). Mahasui is spoken by its native inhabitants only in their home domain. Although the language has a rich store of folklore, it has not been adequately documented or analyzed. This research endeavours to fill a tiny part of this gap through the study of Mahasui proverbs.

Proverbs are one of the shorter forms of folklore that can be used in free speech to express intention, desire, or opinion. Peter Seitel (1976) in *Folklore Genres* describes proverbs as "...the strategic social use of metaphor, that is, as the manifestation in traditional, artistic, and relatively short form of metaphorical reasoning, used in an interactional context to serve certain purposes" (139). The older native Mahasui speakers use proverbs, idioms, and phrases in free speech, allowing the language speakers to convey harsh truths and comments with an impersonal touch.

## 2. Research Aim

This research aims to explore Mahasui as an invaluable resource of indigenous knowledge, essential for a sustainable outlook. To this end, this paper examines the Mahasui proverbs for the wisdom they convey regarding moral and cultural values. It also examines how proverbs contribute to the formation of language speakers' outlook and how they can be beneficial in a multicultural and multilingual context, where sustainable living is crucial for a better life globally.

### 3. Literature Review

In a study, folklore was found to play a prominent role in maintaining everyday peace (Nocheva, N., 2023). The collective narratives of folklore disseminate collective knowledge shared by the society, from which everyday peace originates, marking folklore important for social cohesion. The ethnographic study of the proverbs in the Oku language revealed their role in conserving the community's culture and heritage, as well as their empowering effect (Ndem, N., 2025). These proverbs are based on the daily practical encounters of the community members. It was found that the Oku proverbs impart moral lessons, warnings, and knowledge essential for fostering better interpersonal relationships, promoting community living, and facilitating sustainable development. Similarly, lessons in sustainability and traditional ecological Knowledge are also found in traditional Bengali proverbs (*Khanar bacan*; Bhattacharjee & Sinha, 2023). It highlights the role of proverbs in imparting knowledge related to the ecosystem and the close relationship humanity shares with nature, promoting them as a pedagogical tool for ecological literacy.

Along with ecological literacy, proverbs can also be used to convey knowledge of indigenous wisdom and tradition that helps tackle and challenge everyday problems. The historian Alaima Talu, from the Oceania region, is cited by Dr. Max Quanchi (2004) as stating that the Pacific's wisdom and knowledge have arisen from the lives of people in the region over the years. As a result, it gradually became an integral part of their daily lives. The local advice imparted over time became heritage and helped in the biodiversity management, challenging the colonial perspectives (Quanchi, M. 2004)

### 4. Methods

The research uses already documented Mahasui proverbs as the primary data for this study. Archival research was conducted at the Academy of Culture, Art, and Languages, Himachal Pradesh. Through this research, sources on Mahasui proverbs from Hans Hendriksen's *Himachali Studies* (1979) were found, along with Himachal Pradesh's state journal articles on Mahasui proverbs in the journal *Somsi*. From the *Somsi* journals, research articles by Asah Chauhan (1977), Uma Sharma (1977), Meena Sharma (1981), and Hari Ram Justa (1977) were found. While the proverbs in Hans Hendriksen's collection are transcribed with an English translation accompanying them, the proverbs in the *Somsi* articles were written in Mahasui using Devanagari

script. The articles do not provide an English translation and either only list the proverbs or briefly summarize their meaning. As a result, these proverbs have been transcribed using IPA with an English translation by the author herself, who is also a native speaker of Mahasui. However, the transcriptions and translations were done after consulting an elder Mahasui speaker on the meaning and pronunciation of the proverbs. From the overall data, 56 proverbs that encoded daily practices helping to shape the outlook of the speakers were chosen and categorized using a cultural linguistic approach (Farzad, 2017) to study the cultural schemas related to everyday traditional, cultural, and ecological perspectives. The qualitative analysis of the proverbs was conducted to examine the traditions and beliefs that form the framework for the folklore, particularly the proverbs of Mahasui.

## 5. Results & Discussion

From the analysis of the collected data on Mahasui proverbs, it is found that Mahasui proverbs are heavily coded with Mahasui culture and experiences. Mahasui proverbs work as prognostic signs with significantly less application of metaphors. The Mahasui proverbs do not simply dictate but impart wisdom by drawing on the missteps encountered by them and the lived experiences of their ancestors. Sharing human experiences without communication enhances one's experience (Boothbey, E.J., et al., 2014). Mahasui folklore contains incidents from the lived experiences of their lives, which are passed down through the community without direct communication. This helps people make use of past lived experiences to gain wisdom.

Along with shared human experiences, the Mahasui community's cultural values also find expression in its folklore. The cultural ties that people share in a society form their cultural values. Ella Harvey (2019) claimed that the loss of cultural values and heritage due to climate change leads to the loss of one's consciousness and awareness related to contemporary issues. Since cultural values are closely linked to a sense of identity, they also lead to a loss of culture and identity, as well as decreased social cohesion.

Together, the shared human experiences and cultural values specific to a community form the moral values and ethics, encoding them as wisdom in the Mahasui proverbs (Fig.1). Wisdom is

one's ability to understand another's point of view and adapt and apply it for one's own thinking, keeping the morality and ethics as integral aspects of it (Sternberg, R.J. 2019).

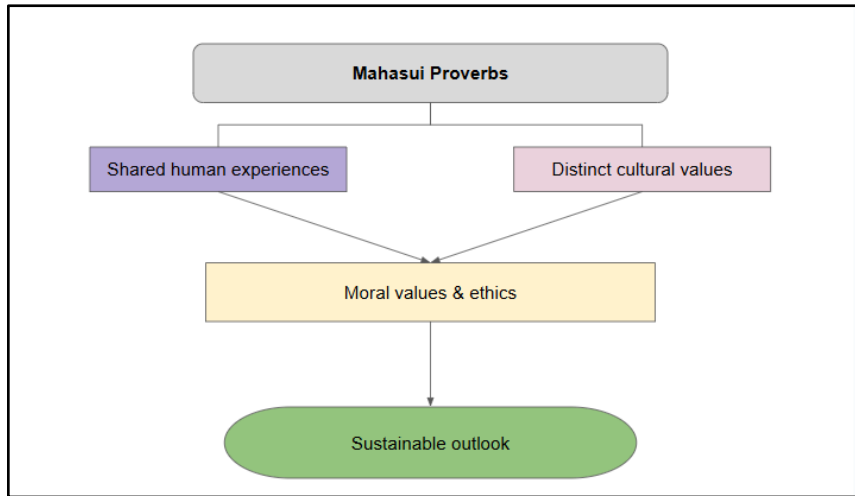


Fig. 1 Diagrammatic representation of how Mahasui proverbs help shape a sustainable outlook.

The analysis of Mahasui proverbs reveals that they are rich in wisdom related to collaboration, cooperation, and societal bonds, which help shape the outlook of language speakers. The Mahasui community's proximity to nature has shaped their lifestyle, embedded in respect, compassion, responsibility, and tradition. Cultural intelligence has been observed to be an effective tool in culturally diverse contexts (Peterson, 2010). It is believed to be a key to preserving intangible cultural knowledge and wisdom that can enhance one's skills in leading and working (Zort, C., et al., 2023). These components of the Mahasui proverbs collectively shape the outlook of native speakers, influencing them to make more sustainable and conscious decisions in their daily lives. This overt, daily decision-making, guided by the wisdom of the Mahasui proverbs, has led to sustainability being an integral part of the community's lifestyle.

## I. Cooperation

In today's multicultural global scenario, people from diverse communities, cultures, and heritages live and work together in proximity. Thus, cooperation amongst individuals is necessary for a peaceful life. Due to the harsh mountain terrain and the difficulty of accessing amenities and surviving, the native people relied heavily on one another. This created camaraderie amongst the people, which motivated them to work together. The Mahasui proverbs have this perspective stored

within them. While the nature of challenges to living in harmony has changed, cooperation remains the key to living peacefully. Therefore, the wisdom stored in Mahasui proverbs is also relevant in the current times. Working together and understanding each other allows us to create great results. This aspect of collaborative works exists in all spheres of work and life, and while it is widely accepted, it often goes unappreciated, is unrecognized, and understudied (Leahey, E, 2016).

Table 1. Shows the Mahasui proverbs teaching cooperation

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>cooperation</b>	ɖui z <sup>hiu</sup> k <sup>hi</sup> ɕi ɡ <sup>hiu</sup> Two hearts are like <i>khichdi</i> and clarified butter	age andu na ba:t ʃ <sup>hi</sup> aɽu I will neither walk ahead nor clear the path.	ʃundzɕe ɖoni, pundzɕe k <sup>hi</sup> ɕe The beak is down, the tail is up.	beʃərma ɖal ɟame, mere a:e ɕ <sup>hi</sup> ɕi: ke kame If a branch grows on the nose of a shameless person, he says it provides him shade	birali re piɕ <sup>hi</sup> ɕia: laga ɖ <sup>hi</sup> ɕni How can the cat's back touch the ground!

The proverb (1) highlights the beauty of complementary working styles, using the analogy of the traditional Mahasui cuisine, specifically *khichdi ghee*. The local cuisine is a comfort food for the community, and the addition of *ghee* enhances its flavour. While discussing a dish familiar to the community and loved by all, the proverb effectively and simply drives home the lesson and benefits of collaboration. Teamwork can help achieve more than individual efforts alone and also increase the speed of progress (Dusdal, J., 2021). While teamwork has its benefits, working together also presents its own challenges. Just as with a perfect food pairing, finding the right balance can be challenging. However, more proverbs help prepare for them. While working together, it is essential to cooperate. The proverb (2) illustrates the nature of non-cooperative behavior and, in turn, highlights the importance of working while keeping the team's progress in mind. While one walks on a path, the speed of different people may vary. In such a scenario, if the one walking ahead is walking slower than the one behind, it is common courtesy to step aside and let the one behind pass by to avoid blocking the other. This simple proverb conveys the wisdom of accepting our differences and still progressing at one's own pace without creating obstacles for others. Moreover, the Mahasui proverbs (4) and (5) delve into the issues of recognizing problems

and thereafter accepting them. The proverb (4) talks about the stubbornness of a person which stands in the way of recognizing a problem when it is right in front of them. If one has a tree growing on their nose (problem) and avoids uprooting it by saying it provides them shade, they are only providing an opportunity for the tree (problem) to grow on their nose, which will ultimately lead to larger repercussions. To pretend that the problem is not an issue and avoiding it will cause only more harm. It is only after a problem is recognized and acknowledged that it can be resolved.

## II. Problem Solving

The wisdom of the mountains is stored in the languages spoken in them. One such lesson is that of patience. In the mountains, going on long walks and travelling on foot are standard practices. Therefore, they take longer to reach places.

Table

2.  
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Problem solving	6	7	8	9
	<p>၁:၃ တံာ်ခါ ပံာ်တိုက် ဝဲ ပံာ်ခဲးခဲး ဝဲကိ: ဝဲခဲ ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး တံာ်ခါ</p> <p>As soon as one sits, the beard gets pulled</p>	<p>ပံာ်တိုက် ကဲ ကဲာ် ဝဲ တံာ်ခါ ကဲာ်</p> <p>Can a book do what the mouth does?</p>	<p>တံာ်ခါ ဝဲခဲးခဲး, ဝဲခဲးခဲး ခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး</p> <p>Think before talking, chew before swallowing</p>	<p>တံာ်ခါ ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး, ဝဲခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး တံာ်ခါ</p> <p>Seven cats jump about, one cat will kill the mouse</p>
	10	11	12	13
	<p>တံာ်ခါ ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး</p> <p>To kill the lice, one should not burn the bedding</p>	<p>တံာ်ခါ ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး, ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး</p> <p>The ploughshare could not be sharpened, so he sharpened the yoke.</p>	<p>တံာ်ခါ ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး တံာ်ခါ ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး</p> <p>The words of the elders and taste of <i>amla</i> hit later</p>	<p>တံာ်ခါ ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး ဝဲခဲးခဲး</p> <p>Fire and water should not be used hastily.</p>

Mahasui proverbs on problem solving

However, this also helps them imbibe endurance and calmness. The proverb (6) tries to bring out the results of haste through the imagery of a man whose beard gets pulled down because he sat down in a hurry without thinking. Similarly, the proverbs (8) and (13) also emphasise the importance of patience. In the proverb (13), the two elements of nature, water and fire, are used to convey the dangers of rushing things.

The Mahasui community resides in a geographical location where it snows during the cold winters. Thus, they often need to keep a fire burning in their hearth to keep themselves warm and to heat the water for use. Similarly, they have to encounter different forms of water too. Water, if it is too cold and frozen, or too hot, can cause burns in both conditions. Additionally, getting wet in the rain or snow can lead to catching a cold. Since they come into contact with both elements daily, they might take the danger lightly and become distracted, creating more opportunities for an accident to occur. Hence, one needs to practice caution while dealing with them every time. The lesson conveyed through this proverb is to avoid impulsive and hasty decisions and instead practice caution. This is also an important learning for tackling any troubling situation. In today's fast-paced global scenario, solutions to problems are expected within a short timeframe, which can be



exhausting and, at times, create more errors than solutions. In a study conducted by S. Vessel and her colleagues, it was found that hiking, climbing, and trekking in the mountains lead to integrating lessons on hope, resilience, and patience learned while climbing into their daily lives (Vessel, S. et al., 2025). The integration of these qualities improved their quality of life.

The proverb (11) uses the imagery of a farmer sharpening the yoke instead of the ploughshare out of desperation to repair it and finish ploughing the field. Knowledge of mending a plow is needed to understand this proverb. While the sharpening of a ploughshare aids ploughing, the sharpening of the yoke (a harness placed on the neck of the bulls) would only damage the tool and harm the animals. This proverb highlights the futility of haste and the harm that can result when one fails to employ logic and reasoning to address the problem at hand. Proverb (10) also conveys a similar message, using the analogy of burning an entire bed to get rid of the lice, promoting targeted solution finding.

Along with the use of patience in dealing with problems, another lesson taught by the Mahasui proverbs is that of awareness. The proverb (7) uses the rhetorical expression to emphasise the importance of the presence of mind over rote learning. The proverb emphasizes the importance of applying knowledge over mere learning. This proverb can be applied to the current educational system to promote the application of the teachings imparted to the students. Often, it is found that students possess knowledge in various subjects, but fail to articulate it effectively. The proverb emphasises the articulation of ideas as essential to the expression of knowledge. The proverb also signals debate between oral and written knowledge. Ruth Finnegan, in her essay "How Oral is Oral Literature" (1973), brings the study of Oratures into the forefront. In this book, she discusses the contact of orality with literacy and how orality is often associated with being illiterate. Today, the indigenous and minor languages are at significant risk. It is feared that by the end of the twenty-first century, about ninety percent of all endangered and minor languages might be replaced by a dominant language (UNESCO, 2003). The Mahasui language itself is an endangered language that relies on oral traditions for its transmission. Therefore, the presence of a proverb standing for its orality shows how the language expresses the prestige attached to its native tongue. The community values the indigenous knowledge stored within the language. Such knowledge systems are necessary for the current society to embrace its cultures and traditions, to take pride in them,

and refute the belief that the native language acts as a hindrance or problem in the way of learning other languages and earning a better living.

### III. Contentment

The wisdom of achieving fulfillment and gratification in less is much more difficult to practice than to preach, as it requires control over one's desire. Mahasui language's proverbs encode within them wisdom to lead a conscious lifestyle.

Table 3. Shows the Mahasui proverbs on contentment

Contentment	14	15	16	17	18	19
	bōdio dɔ̃le, kʰaio mɔ̃re  Having grown fall, having eaten die	sənara re ʈak ʈak, lʰwara re e:k  The goldsmith strikes many small blows; the blacksmith strikes one.	ɖoea baŋʰəŋa, udzea lamba kebia na bɔŋda  By washing, one never becomes beautiful; by straightening one's back one never becomes tall.	duje re koʃte kʰoblo bɔ̃ro  In the vessel of another, the <i>khoblu</i> is big.	kebi ʃukʰi rukʰi, kebi bakru bjaɭi Sometimes rough dry food, sometimes goat's flesh for the evening meal	səkəŋi re bāde de ləɖdu  Drumbeats from afar sound sweet
	20	21	22	23	24	
	bʰoʈa ra boɾa  <i>Badi</i> made from black gram	o:ɖi lai: mona ri monoli, a:ɕʰi hoa: gʰora ka bɔləka kəɖoli  The desires are always there, but in the end, home's green vegetables satisfy.	ʃo reke kɪ a:kʰije ɖoʃɖo, ʈe a:pəŋi bʰaŋjo kɔ̃ge  If one could see using the other's eyes, we would have taken out our own eyes.	nhale a:le gʰoʊgʰəɽi koʈʰi mile  Where does one find a bird with udders!	ʃəskʰe lao: ɔ: sɪve, ʈəkʰe nəhi boli nəŋga, ʃes kʰe lao: ɔ: heɾi ʈesʰkʰe nəhi boli bʰukʰa  Who has clothes on his body is not called naked; who has a <i>roti</i> in his hand is not called hungry.	

The proverb (14) describes the circle of life using the analogy of a tree. Just as it is the nature of a tree to grow into its complete form and thereafter fall, it is inevitable for man too to grow old and die. In a randomized controlled trial, it was observed that individuals who received an intervention

for increased mortality reported reduced fear of death and a more accepting attitude towards it (Spitzenstatter, D., & Schnell, T., 2020). While the life of a tree is directly mentioned in the proverb (14), the second line of the proverb, /k<sup>h</sup>aio m<sup>o</sup>re/, denotes the fulfilled life of a man. In the Mahasui culture, dying of old age free from disease is considered a blessing and is celebrated with traditional *ulta baaja* and folksongs. This perspective of accepting the inevitability of things helps strengthen and prepare an outlook ready to face different aspects of life, especially the topic of death, which is often feared, avoided, and dreaded. The proverb (18) also stresses the unpredictability of the future and teaches us to live in the present and be satisfied with what we have.

With the acceptance of the inevitable and finding contentment in the process, the Mahasui proverbs also teach about embracing one's individuality. Being at ease with one's identity provides one with a sense of fulfillment. The proverb (15) compares the approach of a goldsmith with that of a blacksmith to emphasize the point that each has their own approach and skill. If one follows the methods of the other, they would not gain the same results. This message is reiterated in proverb (16), which emphasises that one cannot change one's physical traits no matter what. Thus, the proverbs (15) and (16) highlight the importance of embracing the self and finding satisfaction in it.

The proverbs (17) and (19) discuss the importance of self-control. The grass always seems greener on the other side, and the Mahasui proverb (17) describes this concept using the indigenous dish *khoblu* (small balls made from wheat and added to curry). Everyone wants more for themselves, and that greed creates an illusion of always having less (than others). However, it is not always true as is taught by the proverb (19). The literal translation of the proverb shows that the drumbeats sound pleasant when heard from afar, but as soon as you put your ear too close to the drum to hear the drumbeats, hoping to hear the music better, they become noise for the ear. Similarly, more of everything is not always good, and one should find contentment with the sufficient amount available. Contentment is challenging to achieve as desire is always present around us. It cannot be killed, but it can be managed, as is shown in proverb (21). It highlights the comfort of a home, which is better than all the riches and desires. An aspect of contentment is also to realise the value of what one has. The proverb (24) encodes this perception within itself. It conveys the message to

check one's privilege and familiarizes one with the necessities of life, helping one appreciate what one has, rather than what one believes they should have had.

#### IV. Community Living

The shift from villages to cities in search of better employment opportunities and economic stability has led to a decline in community living practices. A study of secondary data revealed that urbanization has created fissures in traditional social networks, which have, in turn, led to isolation and reduced informal support systems (Bandile, A., 2024). Therefore, it is necessary to find measures to highlight the importance of community living and promote social activities that provide opportunities to create social bonds outside the work scenario.

Table 4. Shows the Mahasui proverbs on community living

Community living	25	26	27	28
	ṭṭṭṭṭṭ panṭi ṭṣ <sup>h</sup> apər neī ḡṭṭṭṭṭṭ	apṇṭṭṭṭ ḡḡṭṭṭṭka ga:lṭṭ ni:, ondi neī p <sup>h</sup> ṭṭṭṭki	ali ro zagro, fali mōra bi:z bi:z ni:ja	dziṇṭṭṭṭ k <sup>h</sup> e tiṇṭṭṭṭ, bamṇa k <sup>h</sup> e nai
	Hot water does not scald the roof	You may lead your relative up to the steep mountain slope, but not throw him down.	Ali is holding a <i>zagra</i> , Fali is on the point of dying for want of sleep.	It is tit for tat, it is the barber for the brahman.
	29	30	31	32
	ḡaṭ <sup>h</sup> a re lakṭṭṭṭ, eki ro bo:ṭṭ <sup>h</sup>	apṇṭṭṭṭ mōre hunḡṭṭṭṭ b <sup>h</sup> i c <sup>h</sup> ṭṭṭṭi: ḡṭṭṭṭ pa	ṭṭṭṭṭṭ biṭṭṭṭ ṭṭṭṭṭṭ ḡaṭṭṭṭ ṭṭṭṭṭṭ biṭṭṭṭ mule	ek g <sup>h</sup> ore ḡaḡṭṭṭṭ jamṭṭ c <sup>h</sup> aṭṭṭṭ
	Sticks for sixty men, for one a load	Family puts the dead too under the shade.	As you have suffered sister, so do I	One house even the witch ( <i>daag</i> ) and <i>yumdoot</i> too spare.

Strong family bonds are considered crucial among the Mahasui speakers. They have many proverbs and sayings to exemplify their belief in the importance of close-knit societies as a pillar of a healthy lifestyle. For example, the proverb (25) employs the metaphor of a strong roof to denote a strong family that can face the worst of problems by imbuing solidarity. Proverb (26) conveys that disputes and disagreements amongst family members are a common occurrence; however, they should not break familial ties. Even if a family member has committed a grave deed, they believe it is not a reason worthy of ending familial ties with them. The proverb (32) stresses

this by giving examples of the supernatural beings *Daag* (withch) and the *Yumdoot* as being more merciful than someone who does not forgive their kin for a wrong they committed. The proverbs exemplify the sentiment that blood is thicker than water, emphasizing the importance of kinship relations. Proverb (30) shows that even if a person is found dead, the members of the kin have enough empathy to at least move the dead body under a shaded area. Thus, the Mahasui community prioritizes family above all else, giving precedence to kinship ties over all other considerations.

Along with the kin, community living is also valued. Their moral values dictate that their actions do not harm other community members, but work towards reducing the physical and mental load. Proverb (27) uses the example of two men, *Ali* and *Fali*, to promote empathy amongst the community members by highlighting that one's celebrations can be a reason for distress for the other. The proverb promotes awareness of the effects of one's actions on others, advising sensitivity with respect to people and their surroundings.

Another important aspect explored by Mahasui's proverbs around community living is the importance of cooperation amongst people. The practice of community living helps the Mahasui speakers reduce the workload by dividing it among themselves. The proverb (29) is a quintessential representation of the community's approach. Just as the weight of sixty sticks of wood would be heavy if carried by a single individual, but if divided, would feel light, tasks and problems when burdened on one weigh them down, but together they cease to become a burden. The proverb illustrates how a shift towards a collectivist approach can mitigate the difficulty of a problem. Collectivism is a cultural phenomenon comprising values and norms embedded in cultural practices, artifacts, institutions, language use, and ways of making sense of history (Nicholas & Oyserman, 2009). Living with a collectivist worldview means having strong interpersonal relationships that promote harmony. It includes being sensitive to others' issues and imbuing empathy as expressed through Mahasui proverbs. Another example of a collectivist outlook is proverb (31), which shows compassion and understanding for each other. The proverb utilizes the bond between a sister and her brother to illustrate the strong familial ties that the community shares. The community believes in the idea that 'I am because we are,' accepting the significance of interdependence. This fosters a sense of belonging among community members, strengthening their bond of communal solidarity.

## V. Morality

Proverbs are a storehouse of knowledge. They are observed to hold cultural values that shape the moral conduct of individuals (Oboko, G. 2020). Their role in shaping an individual's moral compass is crucial to the formation of their sense of right and wrong.

Table 5. Shows the Mahasui proverbs on morality

Morality	33	34	35	36	37
<b>Morality</b>	ori k <sup>h</sup> e gja:n, apu k <sup>h</sup> e gəriʃtu  For others, good advice; for oneself, dung	ze apu na sukhi se pauŋe na dinde  What one does not like for oneself, one should not give to guests	b <sup>h</sup> oʃe ri bia soʃa At the side of the honest and unsophisticated man, sixteen	oru ʔ <sup>h</sup> uʃsuk, poru ʔ <sup>h</sup> əʃsa:  For yourself, a small slap, for others, a big slap.	o:ɖəra k <sup>h</sup> aŋa poɖəra g <sup>h</sup> ɔraŋo  When near praises, when afar criticisms
	38	39	40	41	
	a:pəŋi a:k <sup>h</sup> i ra peʃa  One can see from one's own eyes only.	a:g <sup>h</sup> əli ro o:ru, gaʃɖu ro poru  The big piece of <i>roti</i> for oneself, a small piece of <i>roti</i> for the other	ekɪ bare bika kaʔ <sup>h</sup> ɔ ri mi  Once fake items can get sold, not always.	a:pəŋi b <sup>h</sup> ile ciũ: ciũ:, ɖɔja re <sup>h</sup> ile koʔməŋi  To evade giving from one's own portion, but let others' entire portion be taken by family members.	

The community strives to promote impartial behavior among its members. The proverb (34) uses the analogy of serving the same standard of food to one's guests as one eats or receives at home to convey the message of equitable treatment. The proverb promotes the perspective of looking at others through the same lens one uses to see oneself, thereby maintaining fairness and objectivity. The Mahasui proverbs not only promote fairness but also expose the hypocrisy of discrimination. For example, the proverbs (36), (39), and (41) all point to the duplicitous attitude of treating others with a different outlook. They direct our attention towards the discriminative behaviour driven by covetousness. Be it a difference in the degree of punishment, portions of food provided, or land

distribution, the Mahasui proverbs aim at the related wrongs. They thus ensure that no wrong related to equality occurs before them. Through the employment of such proverbs during conversations, they prevent bias and promote impartiality and integrity amongst the community members.

The proverbs also help think about the ethical issue of preaching one thing and practicing another, just as in proverb (37) that talks about people who take advantage of others behind their back. The proverb (40) then makes one think of the grey area between a mistake and a habit. The proverb uses the analogy of selling duplicate products. While one can get away with selling duplicate goods once, repeating the same offense can lead to being caught. The first time can be considered a mistake; repeating the offence hints at a habit formation. The proverb "*one can see with one's own eyes*" only expresses their belief in each individual being their own judge. It prompts one to reflect on one's self-respect. Without them, there is a loss of restraint and consequent loss of trust within the community. Through such proverbs, the language and the language speakers encourage the development of moral responsibility among individuals.

## VI. Responsibility

The Mahasui language encodes within it the wisdom to help make responsible decisions about various aspects of life. They value the experiences of their ancestors and elders above all, making the Mahasui folklore rich in narratives and anecdotes that reflect the community's lived experiences, thereby creating a collective memory storehouse of knowledge essential for navigating daily life.

Table 6. Shows the Mahasui proverbs on responsibility

Responsibility	42	43	44	45	46
	<p>dɔːŋ na paŋgər, tʂʰara bʰɔɾɛ tʂaŋgər</p> <p>(He had) neither wife nor brats, he filled his buttocks with ashes.</p>	<p>za sɛŋa kʰaː kʰɔɾɛa, ʈa tʂʰɔʈa kʰaː naʈsɛa</p> <p>If the elders eat standing, the children will eat dancing.</p>	<p>age age ləbraʹn, paʈʂʰe paʈʂʰe lɔgi</p> <p>The brave and rich man walks ahead, the weak and the poor man follows after.</p>	<p>saːp dɛbo ʃɔgra de, ləkir kela piʈa</p> <p>The snake has crept into its hole, why then do you beat its track?</p>	<p>je aːlo n noiʈa le ʈa ʈalɔ ja noiʈa</p> <p>If you don't learn when young, you cannot learn when old</p>

	47	48	49	50	51
	<p>ḡeu bola ṡṡ<sup>h</sup>erea, seṡo bola erea</p> <p>The god speaks after obsession, wise man after consideration</p>	<p>b<sup>h</sup>iro ṡa b<sup>h</sup>iro p<sup>h</sup>iro b<sup>h</sup>i</p> <p>Started the work, but did you think it through?</p>	<p>gole zōṡ gōṡga, ṡṡi ubi g<sup>h</sup>o:r</p> <p>It is ganges up to the neck, above that darkness</p>	<p>cavəlo ri ek gultṡi ḡek<sup>h</sup>i, sara hāḡa nəḡi k<sup>h</sup>areli</p> <p>Check one grain of rice, not stir the entire container.</p>	<p>ṡaṡe mui ṡaṡu, ṡāvəṡe a:e a:ṡu</p> <p>The mother-in-law died in the spring, the tears came in monsoon</p>
	52	53	54	55	56
	<p>ṡeṡe baṡ a:gəli gəi seṡe baṡ pṡc<sup>h</sup>li gai:</p> <p>The path that goes forward also goes back</p>	<p>g<sup>h</sup>aṡo a:ṡo ṡ<sup>h</sup>əṡoi:ro ḡeṡ: suṡ<sup>h</sup>əṡṡ ḡi paṡo</p> <p>They've reached the ground for <i>Thoda</i>, now they are loosening their woolen pajama</p>	<p>gṡi: re b<sup>h</sup>ule koho kṡ ṡəbi</p> <p>One mistaken step and one can go a long way in the wrong direction</p>	<p>ṡere mṡa ka k<sup>h</sup>əṡṡo aṡṡ<sup>h</sup>o</p> <p>Resin is better than your honey</p>	<p>g<sup>h</sup>iṡo re ṡoləne g<sup>h</sup>iəṡ, ṡ<sup>h</sup>uko ri ḡeṡi rek<sup>h</sup>a</p> <p>Measure and transfer <i>ghee</i> into containers, use saliva to draw lines</p>

The proverbs number (42) and (47) exemplify the importance of experience. They show how experience holds more power than authority. The proverb (42) mockingly uses the analogy of an ascetic who has never had a *grihasta* life preaching about them. It looks down upon people who ‘splain’ (Bridges, J. 2021) from a position of superiority and evident inexperience. This undermines the voices of others and trivializes the lived experiences. In proverb (47), it is again the lived experience of the elders that is valued above the word of the local deities. The community believes that while the deities advise based on their preoccupation with protecting the people, the elders advise after lengthy deliberations, which are a result of past experiences they have had. While the community respects both the elders and the deities, the proverb shows the high regard for the elders and their histories.

However, one needs to be socially responsible and act as a positive example for society to follow. The Mahasui proverbs convey this message through proverbs that show what can go wrong if one does not take their role seriously. For example, Proverb (2) is a Mahasui equivalent of the famous



English proverb, "*When the cat is away, the mice will play.*" The proverb emphasizes the importance of a position of authority for a smooth-functioning system. In the absence of such a figure, as denoted by an elder in the Mahasui proverb and a cat in English, the youngsters go awry just as rats without a cat hunting for them would. The need for a disciplinary figure is emphasized here, who can instill the proper morals and values for society to move forward. The belief in a role model elder for children to look up to is reiterated in Proverb (46), wherein the value of timely learning is emphasized through the saying that one cannot learn in old age if they have not learned when young. It aims to instill the importance of time and learning through experiences of various aspects of life over the years. Such proverbs collectively convey the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer and its role in shaping the community's culture and outlook.

Accountability is an important aspect for the Mahasui community. If a person is assigned a task, it is expected to be taken seriously and executed promptly. The proverb (51) denotes the importance of timely action. The analogy of a daughter-in-law showing remorse for her mother-in-law months after her death is used to express the disdain of the community towards a person not executing the required task on time. It also hints at the futility of completing a task after the need for it is over. This thought is also expressed in proverb (45). Proverb (52), on the other hand, highlights the community's belief in *karma* through the proverbial saying, *the path that goes forward also goes back*, a Mahasui equivalent of the English saying, *as you sow, so shall you reap*. The Mahasui speakers, therefore, believe in choosing their actions wisely, as they realize the cost of tampering with nature, as indicated by Proverb (54). The proverb (49), through the metaphor of the River Ganga flowing over one's head, denotes the harms of overexploitation and the repercussions of reaching one's tolerance limit. Hence, the community condemns overconsumption and recommends restraint in all spheres of life. The proverb (56) is a prime example of the Mahasui community's belief in using everything in moderation and saving something for times of distress.

## 6. Conclusion

Sustainability cannot be achieved in isolation. It requires various lifestyle changes for it to take effect. Both distinct cultural values and shared human experiences contribute to the formation of moral values and ethics that are integral to wisdom. The attained wisdom then helps understand

lessons and teachings while navigating everyday life. All these together promote sustainability and a sustainable outlook. The Mahasui proverbs are composed of everyday life and experiences. These everyday, mundane influences, over time, help navigate the world in a globalized scenario. The lived experiences of the Mahasui community are passed on to the next generation through Mahasui folklore, especially the proverbs. The Mahasui community values and trusts the experiences of its elders and ancestors as guides. Therefore, folklore is a treasure trove for the community that is woven around the lived experiences, oral history, and culture of Mahasui speakers.

By drawing on the wisdom of their ancestors, the Mahasui speakers can develop and acquire leadership and management skills. While the community previously utilized these skills in an agrarian society, they are also valuable for various work-related opportunities available in cities. They teach the importance of collectivism, an outlook that promotes community development and wellbeing over individualistic interests. This interpersonal knowledge is important for being aware of others' needs, desires, and goals, promoting empathy. With this, an atmosphere is created that fosters a community that lives sustainably and responsibly. In today's fast-paced global scenario, such wisdom helps individuals retain their sense of self and identity while finding their place in a multilingual society. It is the right of every individual to preserve their indigenous language, especially in a multilingual society. With the increased use of major languages such as English and Hindi, indigenous languages are losing their domains of use due to the misconception that they will hinder education and employment. However, each language has its own role to play, especially in a multilingual country like India. Indigenous languages and mother-tongue-based education are essential for the development of a more inclusive and sustainable society. Through the study of Mahasui proverbs, this research highlights the significance of indigenous languages and their speakers' diverse experiences as a missing bridge to a sustainable lifestyle in today's multicultural and multilingual world.

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